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## Making the Most of Composer-Educator Partnerships in Choral Classrooms

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*Choral music educators face challenges when seeking to cultivate creativity in ensemble settings. Beyond small-scale composition activities, an on-going project with an experienced composer can engage students in creative thought processes and result in a well-crafted choral composition the choir performs. Choral music educators can pursue a range of partnerships with composers and effectively involve students in a project that enhances their understanding of creative music making.*

**The goal –** Conceptual understanding of three artistic processes (National core music standards)

**create      perform      respond**

21st century skills – moving from the information age to the conceptual age

*According to Daniel Pink (2005), the current conceptual age requires a new way of thinking, one that favors aptitudes that are high concept (creative) and high touch (empathic).*

**The challenge –** How to teach music creativity (composition) in the choral performance curriculum?

<u>Composer</u>	<u>Ensemble</u>
Individuality (studio art)	Group
Divergence	Convergence

- a) Revamp or supplement the system with composition teacher specialists (itinerants) Reimer (2003)
- b) Innovate within the system (“intrapreneurship”)
  - Small creative tasks (warm-ups)
  - Sight-reading example (practical, small group)
  - Arrange known work (a cappella groups)
  - Compose full choral work (not feasible for every chorus member)

**Partnering with a composer (revealing the process)**

All choral music educators and choirs already **collaborate** with composers

**Centrality of repertoire in our curriculum**

Centered around the experience of reviving / interpreting / producing “subsequent performances” of works of art

Where did it originate? We START with a finished product.

What is new or “contemporary” music?

“school music” (Bresler, 1998) – somewhere between trite (low art) and classics (high art)

What is the **PROCESS** by which choral music comes into existence?

How do we **REVEAL** this to our students and **ENGAGE** them in thinking about it?

**Partnerships** or collaborations are already the primary ways teachers innovate (Hanson, 2015)  
History – Young Composers Project (1959-64) and Contemporary Music Project (1963-73)

## What composers / choral music educators want

### Composer wants

- Fame/fortune
- Artistic distinction/accolades
- Compositions performed/sold
- Recognizable, distinct voice
- An inspiring/energizing project (motivation)
- To grow/evolve (not keeping repeating self)

### Educator wants

- Repertoire that provides varied/interesting learning opportunities for singers (and that teachers are excited to teach)
- Repertoire that takes into consideration developmental needs of young singers/musicians
- Ways to “teach creativity” or educate students regarding the creative process in the arts
- Experienced/responsive composer

## What composers / choral music educators can offer each other

### Composer offers

- Potential collaborator/partner for composition project
- Experience/insight – insider’s perspective
- Skill/expertise (past success)
- Flexibility for customizing a work (voicing, difficulty, instrumentation)

### Educator offers

- Ensemble in need of new music [or particular kinds of musical experiences]
- Opportunity to pilot/workshop a piece
- Place to cultivate potential interest in new music
- Experienced pedagogue to facilitate

*\*Sharing examples from a range of collaborations as both composer and educator\**

## General guidelines for choral music educators seeking to partner with a composer

### Choose **composer** carefully

You are engaging (hiring) a person/artist

- Know all her/his works (not one favorite), especially recent works (yours is “next”)
- Learn about their experience collaborating, especially with school-age learners
- Let go of the idea that you want to get a composition you “like”

### Choose a **text** carefully

Meaningful to singers + meaningful/inspirational to composer

Singable (key words/syllables on open vowels)

### Communicate early and often – keep composer informed and valued

### Explore a range of project possibilities (to optimize educational value of partnership)

- Traditional commission (with/without face-to-face meeting)
- Commission with composer consulting students input during process
- Students generate material (melodic, text) – composer puts together
- Student compositions, composer as consultant/advisor
- Arrange a Q & A (via Skype)
- Send letters/email with reflections/questions